

KEYNOTES

The newsletter of the Romance Writers of America New York City Chapter #6

JULY 2015

NEXT CHAPTER MEETING: SATURDAY, JULY 11

TRS, 40 Exchange Place, 12 noon

TOPIC: HOWTO PREPARE FOR READERS AND WRITERS CONFERENCES

RWA's National Conference is weeks away. Are you ready? Do you know how to make the most of the conference? Join us for an informative session with authors Barbara Bent, Lena Hart and Sofia Tate, as they share tips and how-to's on attending readers and writers conferences.



Barbara Bent (left) is a Charter Member of RWA/NYC. Her stories have been published in numerous magazines, including *Star*. Barbara attends a number of writers' conferences throughout the year to learn, network and pick up on the vibe. She finds the energy is different at all of them.

Lena Hart (center) is a Florida native currently living in the Harlem edge of New York City. She is a PAN member of RWA/NYC and the special interest chapter, CIMRWA (Cultural, Interracial, Multicultural RWA). Though she enjoys reading a variety of romance genres, she mainly writes sensual to steamy multicultural/interracial romances with a flare of suspense and mystery. When Lena is not busy writing, she's reading, researching, or conferring with her muse. To learn more about her and her work, visit www.LenaHartSite.com—or you can find her spending too much time on Facebook and not enough on Twitter @LenaHartWrites.

Growing up in Maplewood, NJ, **Sofia Tate** (right) was a shy, quiet girl who went to Catholic school and never misbehaved. If only the nuns could see her now - writing contemporary erotic romance novels with gorgeous heroes, strong heroines, and a ton of naughty words! She is the author of the Davison & Allegra series for Forever Yours (Grand Central Publishing). The first book in the series, *BREATHLESS FOR HIM*, has been sold for French translation right to City Editions. Her second series for Forever Yours, a modern erotic retelling of *Beauty and the Beast*, will be published in 2016—*HIS BEAUTY* in April and *HER BEAST* in August. She has an MFA in creative writing from Adelphi University.♥

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2015 CHAPTER CALENDAR

Jul 11 Aug 1 Sep 12
 Oct 3 Nov 7 Dec 5

KEYNOTES DEADLINE

Send articles to keynoteseditor@gmail.com
 by the 15th of the month. All articles
 must be typed and up to 500 words.

We welcome all subjects!

**RWA/NYC BOARD OF DIRECTORS**

President: Ursula Renée
 Vice President/Events: Kate McMurray
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 PAN Liaison: Falguni Kothari
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 Critique Group: Mimi Logsdon
 Keynotes Editor: Briana MacPerry
 Publicity: Jeanine McAdam, Jean Joachim
 Michael Molloy, Maria Cox
 Website: Ursula Renée

ATTENTION: The Board welcomes all
 comments/suggestions/etc. Please send emails
 to info@rwanyc.com.

MEETING INFO: RWA/NYC meets the first
 Saturday of each month. Meetings are held at
 TRS,40 Exchange Place, NYC. 12 noon.
 Membership is at the discretion of the Board.
 Annual dues are \$40. Make all checks payable
 to RWA/NYC. There will be a \$20 fee on
 returned checks.

RWA/NYC

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 New York, NY 10163
www.rwanyc.com
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rwanycblogginginthebigapple.blogspot.com

NEXT MEETING DATE:

Saturday, August 1, 12noon
 TRS, 40 Exchange Place

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE: STEPPING BACK IN TIME
BY URSULA RENÉE

While I prefer the convenience of the Internet, whenever possible I visit museums to experience first-hand the sights, sounds and smells of the time period in which I am writing.

Old Bethpage Village Restoration (<http://www.nassaucountyny.gov/2850/Old-Bethpage-Village-Restoration>), located on Long Island, offer the opportunity to tour period homes and speak to reenactors dressed in period clothes.



Blacksmith



Powell's Farm



Villagers



Sheep

Thanks to the support and encouragement of the members of RWA/NYC, Ursula's debut novel, SWEET JAZZ, was published in September 2014. As President of RWA/NYC, Ursula wants to offer the same encouragement and guidance to other RWA members. Visit her at www.ursularenee.com.

MORE photos on page 4.♥

Historic Richmond Town (<http://www.historicrichmondtown.org/>), located in Staten Island, is another living museum.



General Store



Classroom

Besides the living farms, there are various historic houses in New York City. These include the Van Cortlandt House (<http://www.vchm.org/>) in the Bronx and the Kingsland Homestead (<http://www.queenshistoricalsociety.org/>) in Queens. The Morris Jumel Mansion in Manhattan (<http://www.morrisjumel.org/>), is celebrating its 250th Anniversary the year and it is the home of the RWA/NYC Romance Festival.



Van Cortlandt House



Morris Jumel Mansion

The Metropolitan Museum of Art (<http://www.metmuseum.org/>) or the New York Historical Society (<http://www.nyhistory.org/>) offer various exhibits throughout the year and permanent collections of tools and everyday items from a variety of time periods.

For more information about the historical houses in New York City, visit the Historic House Trust at http://www.historichoustrust.org/item.php?i_id=20.

WELCOME NEW MEMBERS



Mary Devlin
Tiffany Jackson
Amanda Whidden

**CHAPTER MINUTES: JUNE 6 MEETING
BY SECRETARY SHIRLEY KELLY**

Board Members Present:

President Ursula Renée Shand
Vice President Kate McMurray
Treasurer Tamara Lynch
Secretary Shirley Kelly
Past President Maria Ferrer

Board Member Not Present:

Vice President Vanessa Peters

Committee Members Present:

PAN Liaison - Falguni Kothari
Blog/Social Media - Maria Ferrer
Critique - Mimi Pizarro-Logsdon
Publicity - Michael Molloy
Retreats/Website - Ursula Renée Shand

Members Present: 19

President Ursula Renée Shand opened the meeting at 12:15 p.m. Past President Maria Ferrer made a motion to accept the April General Meeting Minutes, Mimi Pizarro-Logsdon seconded the motion.

Ursula said anyone interested in volunteering for the Romance Festival should contact Michael Molloy. Michael said we'll decide by Thursday the 18th if we need to cancel the event due to rain. Anyone not able to attend the new date will receive a refund.

Ursula said the date for the Golden Apple Awards will be determined soon. The fall retreat will be the weekend of October 24th. Details will be forthcoming.

Treasurer Tamara Lynch said we have approximately \$9,500 in the bank. We still need to pay for the Festival.

Secretary Shirley Kelly said we have 91 members.

Vice President Kate McMurray said the GAA winners have all been contacted and their names appear in Keynotes. She still needs to finalize the venue.

Ursula said the Kathryn Hayes "When Sparks Fly" contest opened on June 1st. She explained what we're looking for, and said all the information for the contest can be found on our website.

Maria F. said the “Happy Endings” blog tour is ending. Next week she’ll start with the Hero tour. In July she’s planning an Historical tour. She’s open to all ideas, and asked for book covers.

Mimi said the critique group will now be meeting once a month on a Wednesday. She encouraged people to attend, and said she’ll post information on the loop. Ursula said we’ll be having a critique session after today’s meeting.

Ursula said the July issue of Keynotes’ theme will be “I Love NY”. The deadline is June 15th for any articles NY related. We’ll be handing out issues at the National Conference.

Ursula said we need a PAN Liaison. Falguni Kothari volunteered. Maria Cox is our PRO Liaison. Anyone who becomes PRO receives a pin.

Michael said the Romance Festival will be on June 20th from 1-4:30. There’ll be a live band. All volunteers and authors should plan to arrive at noon. Promotional postcards were handed out. Ursula said we’ll discuss the Brooklyn Book Festival after the Romance Festival is over.

Ursula said the fall retreat will be the weekend of October 24th at the Inn at Ocean Grove in NJ. Rooms will be \$119 or \$99 , if we book more than 5 rooms. Breakfast is included. Sharae Allen said she’ll put information about the area on the loop. Maria F. suggested people bring books to donate to the Inn’s library.

Ursula said for anyone to let her know if their link needs to be fixed on the Author’s page. She brought her laptop if anyone needs help.

Maria F. encouraged everyone to attend the next Writing Marathon, which will be held at the Citicorp Center from 12-3 p.m. Date TBD. There’s no electricity available.

The meeting adjourned at 12:43 p.m.♥



ATTN CONFERENCE ATTENDEES. Please let Ursula know if you are going, and especially if you will be signing at the Literacy Book Signing. She has a surprise for you!♥

CHAPTER CALENDAR



July 11 -- Chapter Meeting
 July 18 -- Writing Marathon
 July 22-25 -- RWA National Conference in NY
 August 31 -- Deadline to enter contest
 September 17 -- Golden Apple Awards
 October 23-25 -- Fall Chapter Retreat

MEMBER NEWS



Deborah Blumenthal, Katana Collins and Kate McMurray read at June's Lady Jane's Salon. Of course, the audience was filled with supporting RWA/NYC members.

Kwana Jackson, Shara Moon (wa Lena Hart), Alyssa Cole & Falguni Kothari will give a Multicultural romance panel at RWA15. While **Lisa Siefert** will be holding a Pilates for Writers workshop at the conference.

LaQuette's first two books of her Queens of Kings series -- **HEART OF THE MATTER** and **DIVIDED HEART** -- are being procured by the Queens Public Library for circulation. "The public library is really where I fell in love with the romance genre," said LaQuette. "I would raid the shelves of my local library in Brooklyn every few days until I devoured all of their collection. Now, more than twenty years later, my books will have the opportunity to feed someone else's curiosity and addiction, and that's... well, that's just amazing."♥

2015 GOLDEN APPLE AWARD WINNERS

Mark your calendars for **September 17**, when we will honor our GAA winners:

- Lifetime Achievement Award: Thea Divine (top photo)
- Publisher of the Year: Carina Press
- Editor of the Year: Kristine Swartz, Berkley
- Agent of the Year: Kimberly Whalen, Trident Media Group
- Media Source of the Year: HEA/USA Today
- Librarian of the Year: Jacqueline Woolcott, NYPL
- Author of the Year: Jeanine McAdam (bottom photo)



Congrats to RWA/NYC members, Thea and Jeanine!!
 Stay tune for venue details.♥

**REVIEW: ROMANCE FESTIVAL
BY JEANINE MCADAM**

Even though it was a rainy day, spirits were high at the 2nd Annual RWA/NYC Morris-Jumel Mansion Romance Festival.

About 150 lovers of romance visited the Mansion on June 20th.

The day started with These Machines playing a few tunes on the grand piano in the entryway of the Mansion. Then interesting talks were given by bestselling authors Lauren Willig and Maya Rodale.

Author panels discussed historic, contemporary, paranormal and fantasy romance; plus our festival wouldn't have been complete without an erotic panel and a few authors reading from their works. It could have been the rain that steamed up the 200 year-old windows or it may have been the writers' words.

I'd like to say a big Thank You to all who helped make this Festival possible! See you next year!!♥



**Romance Writers Reading from their works.
Nya, Kate, Becca & Racheline.**



LaQuette and Xyla



Hanging out at the Morris Jumel Mansion.



Authors & readers on the back porch.

RWA/NYC'S ROMANCE FESTIVAL: THE EROTIC ROMANCE PANEL
BY BRIANA MACPERRY



L to R: Briana, LaQuette, Nya, Xyla and Thea

For this year's Romance Festival, I had the pleasure of moderating the Erotic Romance Panel, including such illustrious authors as Xyla Turner, LaQuette, Thea Devine and Nya Rawlyns. Xyla Turner is a lifelong learner, a high school Vice-Principal, an awesome Auntie, and a sucker for sassy females and dominant males. LaQuette is a 2015 Georgia Romance Writers Maggie Award Finalist in Erotic Romance, and a native of Brooklyn, New York, who spends her time catering to her three distinct personalities: Wife, Mother, and Educator. USA Today best-selling author Thea Devine is the author of twenty-eight erotic contemporary and historical romances and a dozen novellas, and was elected to receive the RWA/NYC 2015 Lifetime Achievement award. Nya Rawlyns cut her teeth on sports-themed romantic comedies and historical romances, and currently has 25 romance titles, including sports romances, occult-supernatural, mystery-suspense, contemporary western and gay literary fiction.

I opened the panel discussion with a quote from Ms. Tina Engler, aka, Jade Black, the "queen of steam" and the founder of Ellora's Cave Publishing. Of most romance novels, the entrepreneur once complained, "A lot of times the characters just shut the bedroom door... Like, really? Let's have blow jobs, or something." On repeatedly being rejected by traditional publishers for writing overly raunchy material, she said, "Either I'm a sexual deviant, which is always a possibility, or they're wrong. Turns out, they were wrong."

Indeed, all of the panelists seemed to feel a burning curiosity to know "what goes on behind the door." Additionally, a desire to portray "real life romance," which as LaQuette put it, "can be raw" and "messy." LaQuette also expressed a joy in being able to "call a thing what it is" in terms of using explicit language and descriptive sex scenes. Devine, however, recalled when such language was forbidden by publishers, and found it an "interesting challenge" to stimulate her readers within that limitation.

Each panelist also offered their own perspective on the definition of Erotic Romance and how it differs from Erotica. In case you aren't familiar on the difference between Erotic Romance and Erotica (though sometimes the terms seem to be used interchangeably), here are a few general guidelines:

- Erotica is primarily intended to incite sexual pleasure. Romance is primarily intended to develop a romantic relationship. Different romance publishers have different "rules" about how much sex they allow, what level of detail, and in what circumstances.
- Erotica doesn't require a happily ever after (or happy for now), but romance (which includes erotic romance) does.
- Erotic romance novels are stories written about the development of a romantic relationship through sexual interaction. The sex is an inherent part of the story, character growth, and relationship development, and couldn't be removed without damaging the storyline; the primary and/or subplots can stand alone without the explicit sex, but the characterizations in the story will suffer dramatically if the sexual content is removed.

The panelists seemed to agree Erotic Romance has rarely received fair acknowledgement in the Romance community. This attitude is changing however, with novels such as FIFTY SHADES bringing Erotic Romance into the mainstream. But, it is important to remember, Erotic Romance and the talented writers of the genre have been around for a long time. To illustrate this point, Devine held up a copy of her book, which had been re-branded and given a new cover to look more like FIFTY SHADES. "It's like they're trying to hide the fact that I wrote it...but it's selling pretty well," Devine said.

On what sparked the authors' interests in the genre in the first place: Devine has always been drawn to strong heroines who manage to turn the tables on their dominating partners. Turner stumbled upon reading Erotic Romance, and felt she'd finally found her niche. Rawlyns, an accomplished rider, wondered if sex on horseback were a plausible scenario (with a little willing suspension of disbelief). And LaQuette found herself inspired by and relating to the candid prose of authors such as Zane (best known for her novel and the adapted Loinsgate film, ADDICTED).

In conclusion, the panelists encouraged aspiring Erotic Romance writers to be hopeful, perseverant, and true to their craft. Devine offered, "If you can dream up a story that you would like to read, odds are, someone else would want to as well."♥

Briana MacPerry teaches graduate level thesis writing and works for a brain research and diagnostic facility. When she is not corralling her four-year old son, she is slaving away at her passion's pursuit. To learn more, please visit her blog at www.brianamacperry.wordpress.com, or follow her on twitter @macperrytweets

AUGUST THEME

August's theme is "Get it sold." From revising, to synopsis writing, to pitch/query development, to self promotion and marketing, what is your best advice on getting it sold? I'm particularly interested if published authors have successful queries and/or stories they'd like to share.

AND, we accept submissions on other topics too!♥



WHEN SPARKS FLY CONTEST
BY VANESSA PETERS

The New York City Chapter is accepting contest submissions starting through August 31st.

Fee: RWA Members \$25, Non-members \$30
Deadline August 31, 2015

Eligibility: The contest is open to anyone not publish or not contracted to publish in a novella or full length novel as of August 2, 2015. Self-published authors are welcomed to enter.

Entry: No longer than 20 pages, and must include a 2-page synopsis(not judged). The entry should exemplifies the theme of "When Sparks Fly," in a scene showing the moment when sparks ignite and the attraction between the hero and heroine becomes undeniable. Entries must be received as either .doc or .rtf (Rich Text Format) files only. Electronic entries only.

Categories: No categories. All genres of romance including erotica and LGBT are accepted.

Judges(1st Round): Traditionally Published Authors
Final Judge: Editor Esi Sogah with Kensington Publishing
Top Prize: \$75

Please visit the RWA NYC website www.rwanyc.com for more details. For any questions please contact contest coordinator, Vanessa Peters at rwanyccontest@gmail.com Good luck!♥



BE PRO!
BY MARIA COX



The purpose of the PRO Community of Practice is to establish within RWA a network of communication and support to effectively promote and protect the interests of romance writers in the areas between manuscript completion and PAN eligibility. To help members reach the next level, PRO focuses on the business side of writing rather than craft. This program is available to any active General or Honorary member who: (1) is not PAN-eligible and (2) has one complete original work of romance fiction of at least 20,000 words, or multiple complete original works of romance fiction which combine for a total of at least 20,000 words.

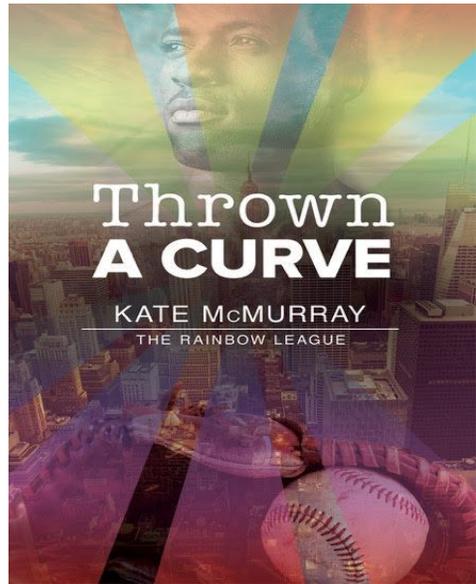
Join PRO: TRWA members must submit an application and a digital copy of the qualifying work(s) to the RWA Office.

Questions: If you're interested in becoming PRO and/or would like more information, you can email me at maria@mywritingden.net.♥

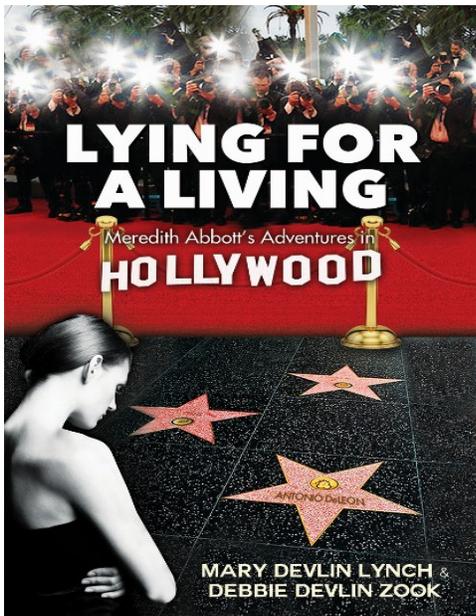
MEMBERS ON THE SHELF



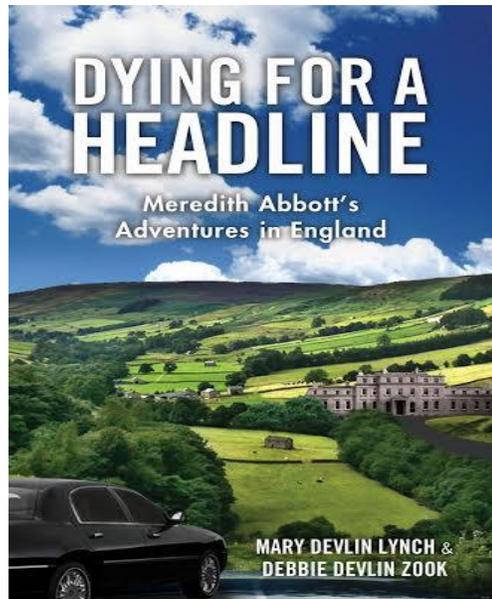
SING ME HOME
 by Lisa Ann Verge
 Bay Street Press LLC



THROWN A CURVE
 by Kate McMurray
 Dreamspinner Pres



LYING FOR A LIVING
 by Mary Devlin Lynch
 Devlins Books



DYING FOR A HEADLINE
 by Mary Devlin Lynch
 Devlins Books



*Our theme this month is
I ♥ NY*

CHAPTER HISTORY BY PRESIDENT URSULA RENEE

The Romance Writers of America/New York City, Inc. was founded in 1985. We are proud to be celebrating our 30th anniversary.

The New York City chapter was the brainchild of Nora Siri Bock, who gathered her author friends together: Regency author Theresa Grazia, glitz author Sarah Gallick, and children's author Kathryn Hayes -- and with the advice and financial support of the Hudson Valley chapter, formed a chapter.

In the beginning, the chapter met at the NBC building in the Upper West Side in the cafeteria. As the chapter membership grew, the meeting location changed several times to meet chapter needs. Today, RWA/NYC meets at TRS on 40 Exchange Place, in the heart of the Stock Exchange district.

Being in the heart of the Romance industry, RWA/NYC has been fortunate enough to get front-line editors, publishers, agents and industry professionals to come speak at chapter meetings, a tradition begun by our founding mothers.

RWA/NYC is also proud to host the annual Kathryn Hayes "When Sparks Fly" contest and the Golden Apple Awards. For a few years, the chapter even had its own "From Dream to Reality" conference and we experimented with one-day writing workshops and Published Author Networking Dinners.

In the past 20 years, chapter members have been Golden Heart finalists and winners, RITA finalists and winners, National Regional Service winners, Regional Directors (Maria Ferrer and Dee Davis) and our own Shirley Hailstock was even RWA National President. Today, RWA/NYC has almost 100 members who are published, pre-published and aspiring authors.

We invite you to join us at a monthly meeting, as we gear up for our next decade.♥

Conference Tip:

Bring plenty of
business cards.



SO YOU WANT TO SET A BOOK IN NEW YORK

BY KATE MCMURRAY

During *Sex and the City*'s heyday, I had a job reviewing DVD box sets for a TV review website. I thus wound up watching the first two seasons of the show over a weekend in order to review it. I was too poor in those days for an HBO subscription, so this intense viewing was my first experience with the show. I mostly liked it. But I sure did not recognize the New York City represented in the show.

Much has been made of how the show depicts the city. Sometimes it's spot on. Sometimes it's like a surreal alternate universe. Other New York shows are like that, too. *How I Met Your Mother* (and even *Friends*) got a lot of New York stuff right, but it's so clearly shot on a Hollywood back lot that it doesn't *look* like New York. There are plenty of shows set in New York but obviously filmed elsewhere. Even *Law & Order* doesn't always get it right; for the abovementioned (now defunct, sadly) TV website, I used my jury duty experience as inspiration to write a feature story on all the things that show actually gets wrong. (Like, if you added up all the homicides in one season of the show and its spin-offs, the total is many times more than the actual homicide rate in the city in the 2000s.)

TV gets it wrong, basically. So do books. Nothing pulls me out of a story faster than a mistake about New York City, because I not only live here (and have for coming up on 15 years) but I write and research it constantly. Call me an expert, then.

I was going to give some quick and dirty facts, but I think it might actually be more useful to think about strategy.

Here's what I mean by that. I teach a class on developing vivid settings in fiction (and I'm working on a book about same, so look for that later this year!) and one of the things I emphasize is that the devil is in the details. Here are some actual examples of things I've run into in books:

1. A character took the C train from 207th Street to West 4th Street.
2. Characters took a cab from TriBeCa to Chinatown.

If you don't know Manhattan, you're probably like, "Seems legit." But if you know the city, you're sniggering. For example, the C train doesn't go all the way to 207th Street and even if it did, it's a local train and thus taking it all the way to West 4th would take a zillion years and no New Yorker in her right mind would do it. You'd never know that from looking at a map, though. A lot of detail can really enhance a manuscript, but when it doubt, keep it vague. It works just as well to say, "Jane took the subway downtown."

In the second case, the characters took a cab between adjacent neighborhoods. Manhattan neighborhoods are pretty small, so the characters took a cab a few blocks at most. That's a waste of money, if you ask me; the distance was a ten minute walk, max. Most New Yorkers would just walk it. (For less than ten blocks, I wouldn't even get on the subway.) Again, sometimes vagueness is fine. "They took a cab from the hotel to the lab," works better than, "They took a cab from the hotel on Warren Street in TriBeCa to the Chinatown lab on Canal Street."

Or else do your research. I recommend finding a beta reader who lives in the city while also employing tools like Google Streetview and local websites to get the vibe/geography right.

I also used to moderate a forum for people who were looking for help/advice on how to write about New York. The most common question was, “What neighborhood would a _____ character live in.” I had such a hard time answering those questions because anything is possible. I mean, sure, it’s *unlikely* a recent college grad with a minimum wage job is going to live in a posh West Village apartment, but I don’t know, there could be a rent-controlled apartment and a dead grandmother.

A few small errors are okay and understandable and most readers will pass them by. Some detail is arbitrary and some readers care more than others. My writers group has had lively debates about things like whether or not there are alleys in some neighborhoods or whether it’s really likely that a character would spit out his gum into a trash can on a block that doesn’t have a trash can. For tiny stuff like that, who cares? But the bigger stuff matters. Social media has made it so you can get answers to these questions in an instant, so authors really have no excuse for flubbing the those details. Reach out, and people are willing to help.♥

RWA/NYC VP Kate McMurray is an award-winning author of gay romance and an unabashed romance fan. When she’s not writing, she works as a nonfiction editor, dabbles in various crafts, and is maybe a tiny bit obsessed with baseball. She has served as President of Rainbow Romance Writers, the LGBT romance chapter of Romance Writers of America. She lives in Brooklyn, NY. Visit her at www.katemcmurray.com.

HIGH ON THE HIGH LINE

BY MARY DEVLIN LYNCH

One thing we locals adore is free. My husband and I recommend taking a fresh air break on the High Line (thehighline.org). It starts in the meatpacking district around 12th and goes to 34th street. Lots of greenery, art installations, and so on, a different perspective on the city. Open at 7AM.



Also, we suggest the Staten Island Ferry. If you want a good look at the Statue of Liberty but don't have time for the tour, you can see it beautifully by going over to SI and riding straight back. It is free; we have heard rumors of tourists being SOLD tickets; don't buy them. If you ride the subways and busses, be aware that if you buy a metro card for \$20, you get a free ride.

And if you ride the subway and then hop on a bus, the bus is free as the card gives you a transfer. For fun, dinner on Mulberry Street in what's left of little Italy and shopping in Chinatown! If you are down in Greenwich Village, you should check out Washington Square Park, always something going on from piano player (it's on wheels!) to chess players and so on. Obviously, there are tons of \$\$ things to do, Circle Line is a fun boat ride around the city, South Street Seaport, the new observatory at One World Trade Center just opened, and there's always Broadway. If you're looking for an off-Broadway show at a good price, we really enjoyed 39 Steps! Welcome to the Big Apple.♥

ASK ALICE: HOW DO I GET ATTENTION FOR MY LITTLE BOOK IN NYC?**BY ALICE ORR**



Answer: First you stop thinking of your book as little.

Definitely never speak of it that way. After you get over that Persist Till You Prevail. Persist at your marketing plan which works the same way anywhere – even Gotham. You work it from the inside out.

Walk out your front door. Look up and down the street. Don't look at the tall buildings or the hurrying crowds. That's how a tourist sees New York City. A New Yorker sees it as a collection of neighborhoods. Each one different – like a collection of small towns that just happen to be part of a big city.

Walk off your stoop and down the street. Really look and really see. Walk to the nearest coffee shop and sit down with your notebook. You did bring a notebook. You're a writer after all. Order a java or fancy bottled water or – in my case – a Diet Coke and write these questions in your notebook. Answer them there too.

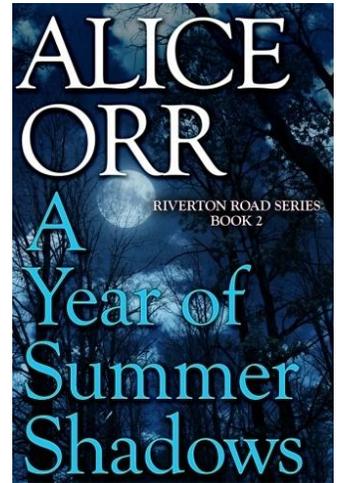
1. **What is the Spirit of my neighborhood?** Trust your instincts. Don't over think. You might want to re-word this as – What is the FEEL of my neighborhood?
2. **What gives my neighborhood this Spirit and Feel?** Be specific. You're talking about overall uniqueness then breaking that down into its component parts.
The organizations that function here.
The stores and businesses that thrive here.
The places where people gather here – people of all ages – including the elders.
The places of worship – all denominations of worship and spiritual groups.
Plus the venues that you brainstorm on your own.
3. **Where/how can I find out about my neighborhood?** Is there such a thing as a paper and print yellow pages anymore? Maybe the Business to Business edition they leave by the mailboxes in your building's entryway. And don't underestimate the giveaway papers and pamphlets. Everything going on around you is in one of those. This is micro research – the Open Sesame to a neighborhood fan base for you.
4. **What do I have to offer that will appeal here?** What about your story could strike a neighborhood note? Every situation and location will be individual to you and your place. Think – Imagine – Find your way to being noticed here.

For example my media mentor Maria Ferrer has a wonderful idea for my series set in Riverton NY. The town has a café called Ginny's Coffee Corner that figures prominently in each story. Maria says to hold events in a coffee shop in my neighborhood and dub it Ginny's for the day.

I've taken a step in that direction by offering giveaways of my favorite coffee mug. Go to my website www.aliceorrbooks.com. Sign up for my newsletter. Find out how to participate in my "I Want to Share a Cuppa with Alice" coffee mug raffle.

I think you get the idea. Start from your home base to find your first fan base and reach out farther from there. Tell your fan base folks to spread the word beyond your address and your address book to theirs. And so it goes. You romance your personal New York City. Then you and your books move on to romance the world.♥

A YEAR OF SUMMER SHADOWS is Book #2 in Alice Orr's Riverton Road Romantic Suspense Series. This is her 13th novel and she's had a true romance everywhere from the start. Visit Alice at www.aliceorrbooks.com.



CHAPTER BLOG TOURS: JULY

There will be two blog tours for July. The first is to promote our "When Sparks Fly Contest" and the second is to promote our historical romance writing members.

For the When Sparks Fly tour, only the contest judges have been invited to participate this time.

For the Historical Romance tour, we invite **all** members writing historical romance (through the Vietnam War) to participate. Please send in the following:

- 1) Book summary /synopsis
- 2) Opening paragraph of your book (150 words)
- 3) Author bio and social network links
- 4) Book cover or photo (send as an attachment)

Send your submissions to Maria Ferrer at ferrerm@aol.com by July 10. Thanks.♥

CONFERENCE TIP

Review agenda and plot where you need to be and whom you want to see.



THE GIDDY GRAMMARIAN: “PARDON THE INTERRUPTION – PARENTHETICAL ELEMENTS”
BY LISBETH ENG

A parenthetical word or phrase “interrupts” the flow of a sentence. However, this interruption may be desired. It can add to the meaning and enhance the style, though from a purely grammatical standpoint, it is nonessential. Remove the parenthetical element and what remains is a complete, grammatically correct sentence.

This element may be a single word, such as “however,” or a phrase. In both cases it should be set off by a pair of commas (before and after), by a set of long dashes, also before and after, or by a pair of parentheses.

- “Todd tried to make friends at his new school. He was not, however, accepted by his classmates.”
- “The editor from Forlorn Publishing – who had not expressed the slightest interest in Doug’s manuscript – was chagrined when she discovered that he was offered a six-figure contract from a rival house.”
- “The economies of some Eastern European countries (Hungary, Poland, Romania and Bulgaria) have suffered from high unemployment.”

You can identify these elements as parenthetical (i.e., not grammatically essential) by the fact that they can be removed entirely, leaving intact a complete sentence.

A similar concept to the parenthetical is the appositive. This is a word or group of words that essentially renames the noun or pronoun that precedes it. It may or may not be set off by a pair of commas, depending on whether it is a restrictive or nonrestrictive appositive. (Don’t worry – you don’t have to memorize these definitions, as long as you understand the concept.)

- “My son, Cornelius, is smart.”

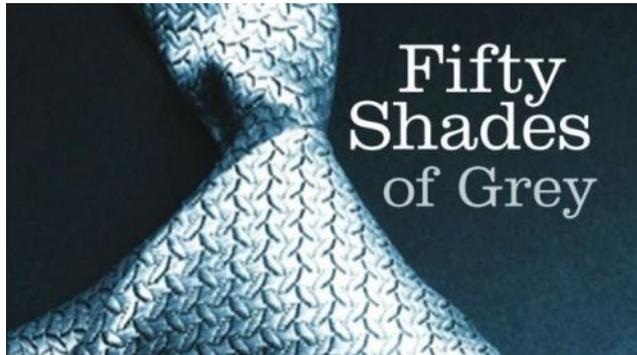
In this sentence, the commas indicate that the writer has just one son and his name happens to be Cornelius. This type of appositive is “nonrestrictive” in that the information within the commas is nonessential – she has only one son so his name is not needed to distinguish him from any other sons, smart or otherwise.

- “My son Cornelius is smart.”

Here the lack of commas makes this a restrictive appositive because it restricts the discussion to one of multiple sons. Without stating his name, the reader would not be able to tell who is the smart son from among all the dummies. The appositive “Cornelius” is essential to convey the intended meaning.♥

Lisbeth Eng works as a Compliance Officer in the financial industry by day and writes historical romance by night. She holds a bachelor's degree in English, and speaks a smattering of German, Italian and French. Please visit her at www.lisbetheng.com.

**AFTER THE FIRST BOOK:
SHAKE OFF THE JEALOUSY AND REFRAME YOUR THINKING
BY KATE MCMURRAY**



An author I follow on Twitter recently let forth an angry rant about E. L. James's follow-up to FIFTY SHADES called GREY, the story told from Christian's perspective. It wasn't the book she objected to so much as the fact that it was being advertised quite aggressively by the publisher and/or Amazon. A number of erotic romance writers reported seeing ads for GREY on the Amazon pages for their own books. The ranting author argued, basically, that E. L. James

didn't need advertising like this because her books had already sold gazillions of copies and this one was bound to perform just as well. So why distract from books by midlist authors who could use the sales?

I can only hope I might one day achieve E. L. James's success, but this complaint still struck me as... short-sighted? Jealous? Bitter? All of the above?

Amazon advertises on all book pages and has for quite some time. It must choose which books to advertise on which page based on some mysterious algorithm us mere mortals will never understand. It hasn't bothered me that much, because the ads are usually small and unobtrusive, and I figure, hey, Amazon wants everyone to buy lots of books. The degree to which this author flew off the handle—and the argument that it's not fair to advertise super-mega-bestselling E. L. James when midlist authors need the attention/sales more—seems disproportionate to the crime here.

The thing is, this level of anger on the author's part is based on this assumption that there are a finite number of readers in the world, or that book sales are a zero-sum game. It assumes a reader is going to go to the Amazon page for a book, see the ad for GREY and then click on GREY instead of buying the book they arrived at that page to buy. And maybe that does happen, but it seems to me just as likely that the reader rolled her eyes at that GREY ad and ignored it. Or that the reader bought *both* books.

I've argued before that I think FIFTY SHADES was a boon to the romance genre. The actual quality of the book became immaterial; the discussion around it not only brought new readers to romance, but it also opened the door for romance about different sexualities (BDSM and even LGBT, I would argue) and established that self-published or small press authors could have amazing financial success (since the book was essentially indie pubbed before Random House picked it up). It also inadvertently spawned the New Adult sub-genre, which has become tremendously popular. FIFTY SHADES increased romance sales, bottom line. I think GREY will, too.

Because book sales aren't zero sum. Some readers have budgets, sure. But there isn't a finite group of readers to sell your book to who might get distracted by the shiny new book and ignore you. That's not actually how the industry works.

The rant this author I follow indulged in talked a lot about fairness. To me, that brought up two issues. First, publishing isn't kindergarten. We don't all get a cupcake. Some authors will be more successful than others. Maybe those successful authors work harder or have better books. Maybe they just wrote something that hooked readers imaginations for reasons you and I don't understand. Maybe the wind was just blowing a certain direction one day. Who knows? But second, I think that feeling of, "Why is she successful and not me?" is tremendously destructive. The question shouldn't be, "Why does she get what I want?" but rather, "How do I do that?"

Because I think the better question is, "How do I achieve my goal?" If your goal is to write a bestselling romance novel, think about what you could be doing to make that happen. Maybe that means taking some craft classes to write a better book. Maybe that means attending a conference and learning more about the industry. Maybe that means rethinking your social media or marketing approach. But if you get bogged down in professional jealousy, it will stymie you.

Writing brings a lot of joy to my life, but I admit that the marketing and selling of books can be frustrating. I fret over sales and reviews just like everybody else. But I don't think E.L. James (or anybody) is taking sales away from me. I think instead about how I can do better with the next book.♥

RWA/NYC VP Kate McMurray is an award-winning author of gay romance and an unabashed romance fan. When she's not writing, she works as a nonfiction editor, dabbles in various crafts, and is maybe a tiny bit obsessed with baseball. She has served as President of Rainbow Romance Writers, the LGBT romance chapter of Romance Writers of America. She lives in Brooklyn, NY. Visit her at www.katemcmurray.com.



CRAFT CORNER: GET LEAN AND TIGHTEN YOUR WRITING
BY ISABO KELLY



Don't worry, I'd never try to advise you on getting a leaner body! But I can speak to tightening your prose. Writing lean doesn't mean you can't create lush, descriptive, eloquent prose. I'm not talking about dumping your voice or style. But cutting out all the excess can highlight your desired style and give you better control of your story's pace and flow. It'll also create an effortless experience for readers that ensures they can't put your book down.

Here are six tips for keeping your prose lean and tight:

1. Cut out the repetition. Often, in our zeal to make sure the reader knows *exactly* what we're talking about, we'll reiterate information over and over again. A little repetition might be necessary to ensure readers remember a vital detail, but too much and it just makes them skim over sections of your story. Comb through your work and cull

all those places where you've unnecessarily repeated things the reader already knows.

There are also subtler instances of repetition to watch for—word reuse, word overuse, repeating character gestures excessively, to name just a few. Ridding your prose of this repetition will immediately tighten your writing.

2. Monitor redundancies. Like repetition, redundancies are often hard for an author to see in her own work, but they can make the writing feel excessive and boring. Consider this example: Sheila yelled at the dog and shook her fist at the animal. "Stop squatting on my lawn you mangy mutt!" she shouted.

This is a little extreme to make my point, but the redundancies should be obvious: yelled, dog, animal, mangy mutt, shouted. Even the exclamation point is redundant to the "shouted". It's overkill. This can be tightened and convey the same information with a simple:

"Stop squatting on my lawn you mangy mutt," Sheila shouted, shaking her fist.

3. Use fewer details and make them specific to the POV character's experience. Rather than go into long descriptions from your omniscient author point of view, pick two or three details that are significant to the story and filter those through your character's perspective. This not only tightens your writing by keeping the descriptions immediate and unique, it gives the reader a deeper understanding of your character by highlighting what they find important.

4. Watch for unnecessary dialogue. Cutting inane chatter or unnecessary bits of conversation can really speed up your story. You don't have to show everything the characters say because many of these things are implied either in the rest of the dialogue or in the situation itself.

Here's an example:

"Have a bad day, huh?" Jane asked.
"Oh, yeah," Stan groaned. "I was late. Boss yelled at me. Spilled coffee on my shirt before a big meeting. And found out I owe back taxes this year. So, yeah. Bad day."
Jane patted his arm. "Sorry to hear all that. It'll get better tomorrow."
This can be tightened with a few simple cuts:
"Have a bad day, huh?" Jane asked.
Stan groaned. "I was late. Boss yelled at me. Spilled coffee on my shirt before a big meeting. And found out I owe back taxes this year."
Jane patted his arm. "I'll get better tomorrow."



Depending on your story and characters, you could even cut Jane's last line of dialogue all together.

5. Be clear. Sometime in our love of language, we get a little carried away—sentences are convoluted and incomprehensible, big words get tossed into the book where they're unnecessary or out of place, etc... What we're actually trying to say gets lost in the glitter of pretty words and unique phrases. First and foremost, your writing has to clearly convey information to readers. This doesn't mean you can't use big words or pretty phrases. It means the reader should understand your prose without having to reread it twelve times to make sense out of what you're trying to say. Make sure your writing is clear, even at its most lush.

6. Tidy up the excess. Don't use six words when four will do. Eliminate those unnecessary extras like "started to" and "began to". Strengthen your verbs. Cut the "just's" and "very's." Simply culling the excess that doesn't add to style or meaning will do wonders for your fiction.

Tightening your prose will give readers a smooth experience and allow them to get lost in the story without tripping over words or skimming "boring bits". Readers might not notice consciously, but when they're deep inside a tightly written book, all they'll be thinking about is "what happens next" and that's exactly where you want readers to be.♥

Isabo Kelly is an award-winning author of multiple fantasy, science fiction, and paranormal romances. Her latest fantasy romance release, WARRIOR'S DAWN, will be available in paperback soon! For more on her fiction and latest releases, visit her at www.isabokelly.com, follow her on Twitter @IsaboKelly or friend her on Facebook www.facebook.com/IsaboKelly.

CONFERENCE TIP

Sit with people you
don't know.



5 ESSENTIAL ELEMENTS FOR A PRE-PUBLISHED WEBSITE BY BRIANA MACPERRY

"Build your platform...You need to have an online presence...Boost your 'likes' and build a fan base...Publishers want to know you can market yourself!" How many times have you heard these statements at a writer's conference or workshop? And it's particularly harrowing if you plan on pitching to editors and/or agents at the Romance Writers of America national conference (#RWA15) this summer.

"But I'm not published, yet. What am I supposed to put up there?"

Here are five suggestions for the pre-published author.

1. Basic Information. Always include a personal bio, contact information, and how you define yourself as a writer. Don't make an editor or agent have to work to find the most basic information about you.

2. Book blurbs. This is a controversial item. While some would suggest posting your story ideas with a book cover mock-up (thus presenting yourself as if you are already published), others would argue you're just handing over your ideas to a potential thief. That said, I've never personally met someone who said another writer stole their ideas from an unpublished author's book blurb and mock-up. Seems a little like stealing the jalopy in a parking lot of porches. Plus, the content on my wix.com website is "all rights reserved."

3. Contest awards. If you got it, flaunt it.

4. Themed Blog Content. Not just "blog content" but "*themed* blog content." If you want to ramble on about yourself, go right ahead, but make it pertain to an aspect of your life people would *actually* want to read about. And just so you know, unless you're a B celebrity, no one really cares about your writing process--except for your critique partner and RWA chapter mates (unless it involves punking half-naked male cover models on a live feed). Your blog is where you have a chance to display not only your writing skill to a potential agent or editor, but also to demonstrate your critical thinking skills, creativity, and professionalism.

Write about something you are qualified to write about. Write about new discoveries and fun facts in your historical research. Write reviews for new releases in your genre. Write about writing in a way that attracts a following of other writers. Invite guest bloggers. Build a community with your blog. Seekerville.net is a great example of this. I've modeled my own blog, www.yellowbrickscommunity.wordpress.com, after this concept as well.

5. Visual content. If your writing is sub-genre specific, make sure that is communicated clearly through text and visual content. If you're not sure what that looks like, check out the websites of your favorite authors. Look at their color schemes, fonts, and the way they organize book covers and other photos on their webpage. But above all, less is more. Keep it clean and minimal.

With the advent of Wordpress and other website building companies, it's easy to build visually pleasing designs through the use of drop-in templates. Book cover mock-ups are one thing you could play with. Character sketches and profiles are something that could easily replace book blurbs, which will allow the tone of your writing to shine through, without running the risk of giving the story

away. If you attend any conferences with other authors or participate in local readings or workshops, post pictures of those events with your friends, because they will draw traffic to your page and help build that sense of community, (and thus, a fan base). The website I used for the photos in this post, I built with wix.com. You can check out my primary author's website at www.brianamacperry.com, and my paranormal author's website at www.macperry.net.



Now, let's say you've chosen what you will from the five content areas above, and designed a website for yourself. Here are some questions to ponder before putting it out there, most of which I borrowed from the Aspiring Author Scoresheet from WHRWA's "Romancing the URL" contest.

DESIGN

- Visually appealing?
- Good first impression?
- Tone of the website matches the genre the writer hopes to be published in?
- Is the aspiring author starting to build a brand image? Can you immediately visualize the target audience?
- Elements are consistent from page to page, making for a cohesive site?
- Clean and uncluttered?
- Photo of the writer – present, professional, and appropriate?

FUNCTIONALITY

- Menu easy to find?
- URL easy to remember?
- Are links functional? Are they used where appropriate (ie, the writer doesn't just mention an event or outside website, but includes hyperlink for convenience).
- Easy to contact the aspiring author?
- Easy to find the aspiring author elsewhere on the web? Social media follow buttons?
- Easy to share content on social media? (Social media share buttons on blog posts, etc).
- Is the website active? New content? Or is all the news outdated?

CONTENT

- Is it clear the aspiring author is involved in a community of writers and/or is actively involved in improving her craft?
- Blog? How is the aspiring author communicating with her audience?
- Multimedia content, or just text and photos?
- Links to writing resources?
- Audience engagement? Are there contests, activities, or a place to interact with fellow fans?
- Easy to subscribe to the website/blog?

Hopefully, this article gives you some ideas. Now have at it!♥

Briana MacPerry teaches graduate level thesis writing and works for a brain research and diagnostic facility. When she is not corralling her four-year old son, she is slaving away at her passion's pursuit. To learn more, please visit her blog at www.brianamacperry.wordpress.com, or follow her on twitter @macperrytweets

SOCIAL NETWORKING FOR AUTHORS: SCHEDULE A BLOG TOUR

BY MARIA C. FERRER

Scheduling a Blog Tour is the responsibility of your publicist. In most cases, that would be You. So put on your publicist cap and let's talk blog tours.

There are two types of blog tours:

Blog Tour #1 is when you invite your writer friends to post articles on your blog driving traffic to your site.

Blog Tour #2 is when you write articles that will be posted on someone else's blog, whether a friend's, reader site, or review site.



Blog Tour # 1 – Your Blog

- 1) Schedule a date. Your blog tour should be about 5-7 days in duration.
- 2) Pick a theme. Try to think outside the box, and if you do pick an “old” theme then give it a new twist to. You can have everyone write a blog post (aka article) or do an interview or a cover reveal, etc. The possibilities are endless. Think of our Hero Blog Tour last month and our 50 Shades of Sexy tour in April.
- 3) Invite writers to blog. Start with your writer friends. You can start with the members of RWA/NYC, other romance writers you've met at conferences, on Facebook, or members of your Yahoo Groups.
- 4) Add yourself to the mix. One of the blog tour dates –either the first or the last—should be Your post.
- 5) Create a banner. Choose a photo for your blog tour and add a caption to it with the name of your blog tour, the dates and your blog address. Then share this “banner” with all the blog tour participants and have them post on their blogs so their readers know to visit your blog during the tour.
- 6) Highlight the blog tour on your site. Post the tour banner on your blog layout and list your guest bloggers. This will help promote the tour and get people excited.
- 7) Start promoting your blog tour:
 - a. Social Media: Post notices on all your social media networks about your upcoming blog tour. For example: you can do a Twitter post on the theme and the dates; then another post on your guests; then a post on what guests are writing about; etc. ALSO, make sure that your guests are promoting the tour as well, and that they are retweeting or sharing your promotional posts.
 - b. Email: Send emails with the date, theme and guest list to all your friends; to all your writing groups/readers groups/ yahoo groups, et al. And, don't forget to send an email to the Keynotes Editor at keynoteseditor@gmail.com.

c. Word of Mouth: Tell everyone and have them tell others. All guest bloggers should be spreading the word as well.

8) Giveaway. You can do one giveaway at the end of your tour or you can have each of your guest bloggers do their own giveaway. Giveaways are a draw, especially free books.

9) Say Thank You. Make sure you thank your guest bloggers for participating.

10) Volunteer to guest blog on their blogs.



Blog Tour # 2 – Outside Your Blog

1) Pick a week. If you have a book launch, then you want the week your book comes out.

2) Ask your publisher if they can reach out to any bloggers they know. Do compare your list to theirs so you are not duplicating efforts.

3) Start with your friends. Ask your fellow writers if you can write a blog post for them promoting your book, and make sure the date you need is available. Be prepared to write a lot of articles.

4) Research blogger sites. Find bloggers that love romance, that love the genre you write. Study their blogs. If they don't do guest bloggers, move on. If they do have guest bloggers, find out the requirements and ask for a date during the week that you need.

5) Research review sites. Make sure you get your book to them early enough that they can commit to posting your book review the day/week you need.

6) Make your schedule. List the dates and blogs / websites where you will be "appearing," include date, blog/website name and their URL (website address). Try to fill in every day for the week chosen.

7) Post your Blog Tour dates on your blog and website so anyone visiting your site knows where to find you.

8) Start writing your blog posts. Make sure to include a mini bio and all your social media links at the end of each post. When you send, include a picture of yourself, your book and any other photos needed.

9) Giveaways are optional, but always a good way of getting noticed.

10) Promote your Blog Tour on all your social media sites. Ask your friends to retweet and share.

11) Remember to say Thank You.

Scheduling a Blog Tour is as simple –and as complicated– as all that. Don't take my word for it. Here are two of New York's Leading Romance Authors, who are planning their own blog tours.

From **Lena Hart** (www.leanhartsite.com):
Blog tours and hops can be fun--but lots of work! Know what you want to get out of it besides a moment in the (virtual) spotlight, i.e., do you want readers to know you have a new release (send out a blitz), do you want them to know more about the book and characters (write a post), do you want them to know more about YOU (do an interview). At the end of the day, you will have the (virtual) floor for a week so be sure to maximize on the exposure and remember to stay organized and engaged with your audience!



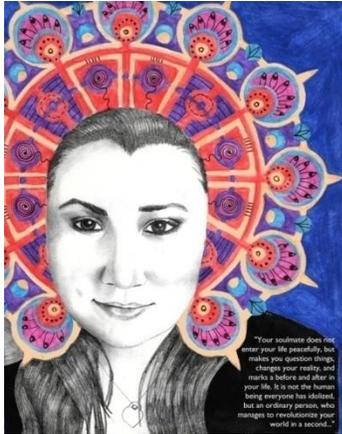
From **Alice Orr** (www.aliceorrbooks.com): I chose to set up my blog tour on other people's blogs because I want to spread my visibility to those mailing lists and blog readers. I had launch week for *A YEAR OF SUMMER SHADOWS* filled with daily guest posts from June 22nd on. Additional guest posts are scheduled into August. I really enjoy getting to know these bloggers. I look forward to getting to know their readers too.

I wish you much success on your blog tours. And if you find a better of doing them, let me know!
Happy Writing and Happy Reading.♥

Maria Ferrer writes contemporary romances under her own name and erotica under the name of Del Carmen. Her short stories have been published by Cleis Press, Ravenous Romance and Riverdale Avenue Books. They have also appeared in Cosmopolitan for Latinas, Penthouse and Star magazines. Visit her at www.marializaferrer.blogspot.com and www.mydelcarmen.com.

CONFERENCE TIP

Be Calm.
Be Professional.
Be Positive.



THE IDEAL RELATIONSHIP BY BRIANA MACPERRY

While chastising me for harboring fanciful ideas about sexually faithful men who'll hold your hand during sunsets well into old age, a good friend once said to me, "There are only two kinds of men. Those who treat their wives and their mistresses well, and those who don't. You decide which one turns you on, then you decide which role you want to play."

"I don't believe that," I responded, "There are men who are devoted to their wives."

"Miserable men who wish they had the balls not to be. Tell me, does your Prince Charming day dream about internet porn?"

My dear friend is not alone in her assessment. Jokes abound about the drudgery of marriage. Oscar Wilde once said, "A man who marries his mistress leaves a vacancy in that position." The Spanish word for "spouse," esposas, also means "handcuffs." Why are married women usually heavier? Because single women come home, see what's in the fridge, and go to bed. Married women come home, see what's in bed, and go to the fridge.

In 1988, the then governor of Colorado, Roy Romer, called an extraordinary press conference during which he admitted his wife of forty-five years had been aware of and accepted a long-running extra marital affair that had become publicly known.

"What is fidelity?" he asked the surprised reporters. "Fidelity is what kind of openness you have. What kind of trust you have, which is based on truth and openness...In my family, we've...tried to arrive at an understanding of what our feelings are, what our needs are, and work it out with that kind of fidelity."



Can you imagine having that conversation?

I can. I had it six months ago when my boyfriend of nearly a year confessed the thought of remaining sexually faithful to me for an indeterminate amount of time, literally, made his throat close up. In the same breath, he uttered those three little words I'd been dying to hear; "I love you."

To say it was out of left field would be to understate all clichés for the next century. I'd had no warning he felt so smothered. The sex wasn't great, it was the best I'd ever had, and he'd expressed the same sentiment (on several hot and heavy occasions). He wasn't pulling away, in fact, every free moment I had, he made sure to be available. He texted me every day throughout the day, and called me every night before bed. I couldn't fathom when he would have the time to *think* about sleeping with anyone else, let alone pursue it.

So what did I do? I stopped talking to him for a week, during which time I spoke at length with my poly-amorous friends and did a mountain of research on the male sex drive and brain chemistry. Then I wrote a blog post entitled, "It's Not Cheating, It's Just Sex," and decided to give him a call.

"So what, ideally, do you want from this relationship?" I asked.

"I want you to be my girlfriend. I want everything to stay the same, except we can sleep with other people, if we want to."

"And...do you want to talk about those experiences with me?"

"No. I prefer a don't ask don't tell policy."

Smothering a soul-deep wail, I said, "I am going to suspend my ego and my judgment for an experiment. It is only because I love you and respect you as a human being, that I am willing to do this. I cannot know it's not for me, for sure, until I try." There was always the possibility I might enjoy the type of freedom this arrangement could afford, right?

Believe me when I tell you, nothing in the relationship changed. Not a thing. He still called like clock work. He still occupied every free second of my time. He still appeared in everyway emotionally available, if not more so. The sex remained fantastic. But after six months of crying in the shower on a daily basis and driving myself crazy imagining how many other women he could possibly be screwing (and in what positions), I decided everything felt like a lie. And I'd had enough of feeling like I wasn't enough. I'd been pulling away from him, it just took six months to do it.

When I said I wanted to break up, he was left speechless. He thought everything was going so well. My concessions had only deepened his love and commitment to me. I understood and accepted him more than anyone he'd ever known. He was really starting to believe I was "damn near perfect."



None of it made me feel better. I couldn't stop looking at it in terms of "stakes." If I were to write a query outlining my relationship and its core conflicts, an editor would reject it because the stakes wouldn't be high enough. I could just see the red lettering: "This deflates the conflict because the hero doesn't care if the heroine steps out of the relationship."

Readers of Lora Leigh's Breed Series totally get this, don't you? I mean, the climax of every love story is when the half-man half-beast bites her neck and shouts, mid-orgasm, "MINE!" Not, "Mine, every Saturday and Sunday when your son is with his father, but not on the designated week day when we get to do whatever we want, no questions asked."

And so, while neither of us really wanted to, we parted ways, because—to coin another understated cliché—love isn't enough.

But, as a romance writer, I am eternally optimistic. And so, while I learned a lot through the development of that relationship, perhaps, more importantly, I was left with questions. One question, in particular, was stuck on repeat: "What is *your* ideal relationship?"



I realized, I had a lot of ideas floating around in my head, but nothing I could succinctly state. No log line or "hot premise" to sell potential suitors. No mantra to meditate on while holding a rose quartz and praying to the Goddess of love at night. And then I began to think, "If I don't know precisely how to articulate what I want, than how am I supposed to find it?"

I decided to ask a few friends what their thoughts were. Then I asked a few more friends after that. And then I asked people I didn't know. Single people. Married people. Divorced people. Widowed people. People in

long-term relationships. People who just broke up. Almost all of them laughed and said, "That's a hard question to answer."

"I Know!" I would exclaim. "But why?"

I started writing their thoughts down. Then I started doodling their faces. Doodles turned into sketches. Sketches became portraits. Pretty soon, it became a whole series of portraits. And I realized I had tapped into something. I decided to turn the portraits into a Kickstarter project called, The Ideal Relationship Project.

The Ideal Relationship Project is an arts-based, community initiative that aims to create 100 portraits, and collect the subjects' ideas about what makes an ideal relationship, into a self-published book. Each subject is asked to describe their ideal relationship in no more than two sentences, and submit an image they would like to see rendered. The portraits are portrayed in a uniformed style that incorporates a mandala form, intended to promote mental, emotional, and spiritual wellbeing. A process note in the form of a video and blog entry is created for each completed portrait as well, and posted to the website (TheIdealRelationshipProject.com).

The book will be organized by age, gender, and relationship status. Each chapter will begin with an article summarizing the most salient themes in its category, using an arts-based, heuristic research methodology. The purpose of this project is to encourage personal insight, spread the wisdom of healthy relationships, and provide a positive experience for participants.

The project is ongoing and still in need of participants. So far, I've completed twenty portraits, and feel no closer to coming up with my own definition. In fact, I have decided to suspend my thoughts on the matter altogether, until I have finished absorbing the opinions of 100 other people. In the mean time, I might suggest taking a moment to ask yourself, what is *your* ideal relationship?♥

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PERFECT PITCH BY JENI BURNS

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It's that time of year again. Conference season has begun and everyone is all a titter about which conferences they are attending and who they will be pitching to. A quick Google search will turn up more information on pitching than any one person has the time to wade through the week leading up to the magic moment, so let me break it down for you in an east step by step process.

There are two methods of pitching that I have used with success that I'll outline and send you references for, but before that, let me remind you of a few basics that fall into the category I like to call "Pitching Etiquette."

First, know whom you are pitching to. Cyber stalk, I mean, research the person you are pitching to. Taking the time to do this important step will help you along your journey in a big way. Once you know that not only is the agent or editor is a bonafide human being, you will begin to discern their personalities, which will make speaking to them easier. It also may provide the insight into a common ground that will make you a more memorable pitch for them.

Second, dress appropriately for the pitch. If it's a big business conference like RWA Nationals, dress the part. If it's a daylong conference where they recommend the dress code is "comfy casual," dress in business casual. Remember this is a sales call, an interview, and a meet-and-greet all wrapped up into a 10 minute session.

Third is a combination situation. Complete, simple, honest. Have your work complete, keep your pitch simple, and be honest. This is a first impression. Keep your pitch simple - aka short, honest, and offer to submit something polished and complete.

With those three things in mind, you can't go wrong.

Now, onto the actual pitch. As mentioned, I have two pitching methods that I've used. One is the "Save The Cat" method. The second, and by far my favorite is the Michael Hauge's "Selling Your Story in 60 Seconds" method.

Let's save the cat first. So, you've written this book that you love and adore. Let's pretend you've maybe even read and used Save The Cat for plotting or tracking purposes. Then this part might appeal to you greatly. Keep in mind you always open with an introduction and I recommend a thank you for whomever is offering their time to hear pitches.

1. Create a worthy logline/one liner. We've all heard "snakes on a plane" as the logline for the same titled movie, right? Essentially, a logline/one liner is that one phrase that captures the basic plot of your story, including the conflict, genre, audience, and mental picture of the work, all while being somewhat ironic with a killer (read memorable) title.



2. **Create a blurb for said book.** Keeping in mind it needs to tell the basics of your Save The Cat progression, you will want to include Hero/Heroine, conflict, and end with a question. This is a teaser. Think of it like a movie trailer. With, _____ on the line, will flawed description character's name be able to overcome conflict to get what she/he inherently desires? Or, will she other option that is less desirable to character?

3. **Keep it short.** Your pitch really should take at most 3 minutes of you talking. I know, I know, you love your book and it's so deep that it's hard to summarize into only 3 minutes. I feel your pain. I've been there. Here's the thing, you want to whet their appetite for your work. You want them to want to read your book. So, go ahead be a bit of a tease. Don't tell them everything.

4. **Make a comparison to another mainstream work that people are familiar with.** In this area, movie references are typical as are classic books, i.e., ROMEO AND JULIET, JAWS, STAR WARS, PRIDE AND PREJUDICE, etc. These titles have universal recognition power, so use them to your advantage.

5. **Tell a little bit about yourself and why you are the best person to write this book.** If you have written a book set in the 1700's and are a former history teacher, that's worth mentioning.

6. **Ask to submit pages.** Remember earlier when I mentioned this being a sales call? Well, here's where that comes in. You can't sell what you don't ask someone to buy. You'll see it in both pitch examples I offer. Sell your book. Ask for them to look at it.

7. **After they either request or reject, thank them for their time.** You will likely have used the majority of your allotted time, so you may get up and leave the pitching room.

Okay, now let's move on to the Sell Your Story in 60 Seconds approach. As I mentioned before, this is my most successful method of pitching. The reasons are many and the results speak for themselves. But, let's take a minute to explain one important part about this method. Hint, it's in the title.

60 seconds. That's all this takes to pitch. The work required to write and prep is longer, but the actual pitch should only be 60 seconds. Why? Because even on your most nervous day, you can talk to a stranger about your work for 1 minute. And on an agent's most busy day at a conference, they can listen to a good pitch about a good story for 1 minute and then have 9 blissful minutes to themselves to go to the bathroom, get a cup of coffee, refresh their water, check in with the office—whatever they want and you will have just given them that gift on a silver platter.

Hmm, makes you kind of memorable too, doesn't it? Yeah, it does and that's the whole point. You want them to remember you. Let's get to it then.

1. **Introduce yourself and offer a thank you**, then acknowledge that thing you learned about them while cyber stalking, I mean, researching that is a common interest.
2. **Before jumping right into the pitch, explain in a few brief sentences what drove you to write the book in the first place.** Was it because as a parent of an Aspie, you wanted to write a love story that featured a grown Aspie having a happy ending so that someday your child (and many others) would see a character like themselves portrayed in a positive light? Or maybe you write historical romances because you've always been enamored with historical fashion design and wanted to incorporate that passion into something you could share with readers. Whatever it is, keep it short.
3. **Lead from the previous part directly into your blurb.** Again, the blurb is a short synopsis of the book with a hook ending.
4. **Go for "the ask."** Explain the genre the book fits into, where it falls word count wise, if it is similar to other works by other well-known and established authors, and offer to send it either in part or in full.
5. **BE QUIET.** This is the most important part of the pitch in this method. You just talked for a minute straight. Now let them digest what you said and either as a question (or few) or ask you to submit pages. Every question asked should be answered in 30 seconds or less in this method.
6. **After they request or reject, thank them for their time and LEAVE.** Even if there is still 7 minutes on the clock. They will appreciate the extra time.



Both of these methods can be explained in further detail in the books they come from.

---SAVE THE CAT by Blake Shelton

---SELLING YOUR STORY IN 60 SECONDS by Michael Hauge

For a sample pitch utilizing both described methods, a twitter pitch, and a check list of pitching basics please visit: <http://jeniburns.com/perfect-pitching/>.♥

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